

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT ROUNDTABLE, COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Carol Schwartz, Chairperson

"Tree and Tree Limb Removal in the Aftermath of Hurricane Isabel and other Summer Storms."

Good Afternoon, I am Leslie Hotaling, Director of the Department of Public Works, the lead agency for debris removal under the District's Response Plan. I am joined by Dan Tangherlini, Director of the District Department of Transportation. Under normal circumstances, DDOT works alone on the daunting task of maintaining the city's thousands of street trees. However, Hurricane Isabel presented us with a decidedly *abnormal* circumstance.

On Wednesday, September 17, as Isabel made her way up the Eastern Seaboard, the Mayor declared a State of Emergency for the District of Columbia. In doing so, he activated the District's Emergency Response Plan. As we had all practiced in various drills over the past year, the government's diverse agencies recombined into Emergency Support Functions, 1 through 15. Under ESF#3, Public Works and Engineering, DPW and DDOT work together to clear trees and tree limbs from the streets.

Our preparation began four days in advance of the storm as each agency began finalizing staffing schedules, servicing vehicles and equipment, identifying staging areas, delivering generators and prepositioning some emergency contracts. Anticipating heavy debris Thursday night, DPW suspended many of its scheduled services Thursday and Friday in order to focus our manpower on clearing the streets. We instituted parking restrictions on Snow Emergency Routes, effective at noon Thursday, and urged residents to find covered parking,

if at all possible. We began releasing this information to the public as early as Tuesday night via emailed releases to mass media outlets, community listservs and Council members.

On Thursday evening, DPW, DDOT and contractor crews were called to duty. DPW personnel from trash collection, towing operations and street cleaning divisions were teamed with DDOT employees from street and bridge maintenance, urban forestry and traffic services divisions. With the availability of emergency funds and streamlined procurement processes, both DDOT and DPW were able to supplement our regular workforce with specialty crews. Pre-positioned emergency contracts allowed us to hire seven chipper crews to help open streets and three crane crews to remove trees from houses.

To ensure that crews were rested and ready to hit the ground running, we housed them overnight in several DC hotels. At 5 am, Friday, the crews were shuttled to five staging areas across the city: at Carter Barron Amphitheatre (16 St. NW), 900 New Jersey Ave, SE, Sibley Hospital (Loughboro Road, NW), Penn Branch Municipal Center (Pennsylvania and Branch Ave., SE) and W Place/Farragut St., NE. Equipment had already been pre-positioned at the five sites.

Initial damage assessments were gleaned from service requests logged into the Call Center and field reports from DDOT and DPW personnel. DDOT's urban forester reports at least 350 trees were downed by the storm. Additionally, the Mayor's Citywide Call Center logged approximately 1700 tree-related calls. The toll is due to a combination of factors, including the age and size of some of our trees, the force of the winds, the full leaf-cover on the trees and saturated soil from a wet summer. But the truth is, whether the material is snow, flood debris or huge tree branches, it's our job to move as much of it as possible. And

we did. Not only that, we did it without any injuries resulting from live power lines – something that concerned me greatly throughout this operation.

All together, ESF#3 deployed 16 crews with chainsaws and front-end loaders to clear traffic lanes by cutting and pushing debris to the curb. An additional eight crews equipped with trucks, chippers and cranes moved the largest fallen trees and limbs. Tree removal priorities were emergency routes and transportation corridors, residential streets, trees on buildings and, finally, alleys.

On a personal note, I would like to acknowledge and thank the debris management teams, which worked 12-hour shifts, around the clock, for 8 consecutive days before scaling back to eight-hour days, including weekends.

Beginning tomorrow, Oct. 2, a debris removal contractor will step in to take over so that DPW and DDOT can return to our respective core services. The contract totals just under \$3 million and has been awarded to Waste Management/Storm Reconstruction Services (SRS) Inc. For the next three weeks, their job will be to remove logs and trunks from public space; pick up curbside storm debris set out by residents; haul the debris to the waste reduction operation at 5 Southern Ave., SW, and to chip and grind the debris into garden-size mulch. I am happy to say that several tons of the raw mulch will be available to the community at locations that will be announced later.

In the spirit of a roundtable discussion, Dan and I are happy to answer any questions you may have.